

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

By W. M. DICKIE, *Director*

**Communicable Diseases in 1930.**—The first ten months of the present year have brought to California outstanding epidemics of acute anterior poliomyelitis, food poisoning, trichinosis and measles. Chickenpox, whooping cough and mumps have also been extremely prevalent during the first ten months of the year.

Diphtheria, influenza, smallpox, typhoid fever, epidemic meningitis and dysentery are conspicuous because of their extremely low prevalence. Compared with the years 1927, 1928 and 1929, the first ten months of 1930 show an abnormal prevalence of the more common communicable diseases, such as measles, mumps and chickenpox. They also show an abnormal prevalence of the more unusual epidemic diseases, such as acute anterior poliomyelitis, food poisoning, undulant fever and trichinosis.

As a matter of fact, 1930 will long be remembered because of the extremely severe outbreak of epidemic poliomyelitis. This represents the most outstanding epidemiological feature of the present year.

**Quarantine Scarlet Fever Twenty-one Days.**—The attention of health officers is called to Rule 7 of the State Department of Public Health Regulations for the Control of Scarlet Fever, as revised September 13, 1930. This rule reads as follows:

"Rule 7. Release from quarantine and isolation.

"The quarantine specified in Rule 5 shall continue until twenty-one days have elapsed after the onset of the disease and as much longer as is necessary for the complete disappearance of inflammation of nose and throat and cessation of discharges from nose, throat, ears or suppurating glands."

**Large Families in California.**—A report of the United States Bureau of the Census for the year 1928, which has just been received, shows that out of 83,536 births which occurred in California during that year, 29,113, or 35 per cent, were the first births to occur in the families concerned; 20,503 births which occurred during that year were the second births to occur in the families involved—this represents 22 per cent of the total births which occurred during that year; 12,265 births were the third to occur in the families concerned—this is almost 15 per cent of the total births which occurred during that year. After the third birth in a family, additional births occur more rarely. During 1928 there were 7668 fourth births, 4712 fifth births and 3215 sixth births. During that year the tenth birth occurred in no less than 666 families; the twelfth in 254 families; and in one family the twenty-first birth occurred. While larger families are found in many states other than California, it is believed that this state represents a fair average in the numbers of children that are born to California parents.

**Season for Gas Poisoning Begins.**—In spite of the wide publicity that is given to poisoning from carbon-monoxide gas, many deaths from this cause occur in California each year, but particularly during the winter months. Most of these deaths are due to carelessness in the installation or operation of gas appliances or to careless disposal of exhaust fumes from gasoline motors. Every gas appliance should be vented to the outside air and all gas connections should be leak-proof. Automobile motors should never be permitted to run in a closed garage or other enclosed space.

Simple precautions in the operation of gas appliances and automobiles would prevent close to one hundred deaths from carbon-monoxide poisoning that occur in California annually. It is surprising to find that many gas water heaters and ranges are not vented to the outside air. Gas water heaters are often placed in closets opening into kitchens with no provision for venting the exhaust fumes. Space heaters,

in bedrooms, with rubber hose connections are also responsible for many deaths. Too often the rubber hose deteriorates, becomes leaky or is accidentally disconnected. Proper precautions against these accidents should prevent many deaths.

The exhaust gases from automobiles are so insidious that many persons are overcome before they realize that they are in danger. It is unwise to take any chances in the matter. No motor should be permitted to run in a closed garage. In commercial garages, where mechanics are employed, provision should be made for proper ventilation of the premises. Many cases of nonfatal industrial illness are due to inhalation of carbon-monoxide gas.

It is customary at this season of the year for health departments to issue warnings relative to the dangers that lie in carbon-monoxide gas. If the warning were heeded everywhere, many needless deaths might be prevented.

**Sanitary Engineering.**—The Bureau of Sanitary Engineering made a survey of all sanitary engineering work in the Imperial Valley, in coöperation with local health authorities. This survey involved municipal projects in both sewage disposal and water supply.

At the request of the Fish and Game Commission, an investigation was made of the effect of the Big Bear Hatchery on the creek into which its waste water is discharged. Plans were made for making a study of the effect of milk wastes upon fish in a small stream in Sonoma County. This study is to be undertaken in coöperation with the Fish and Game Commission and the University of California College of Agriculture, at Davis.

The joint study of the pollution problems in relation to the proposed establishment of a salt water barrier in the San Pablo Bay is still under way.

**Postage Required for Laboratory Specimens.**—The attention of all health officers in the state is directed to the following letter from the Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service relative to the necessity for placing postage stamps upon all packages containing laboratory specimens for examination in the State Bacteriological Laboratory at Berkeley.

Treasury Department  
Bureau of the Public Health Service  
Washington

October 20, 1930.

To Collaborating Epidemiologists of the United States Public Health Service.

The Post Office Department has requested the Public Health Service to instruct its collaborating epidemiologists relative to the use of penalty envelopes, cards, and labels.

It appears that the chief of a state hygienic laboratory had penalty labels printed and sent a notice to assistant collaborating epidemiologists in the state informing them that they could send specimens to the State Laboratory, using the labels without payment of postage.

The Post Office Department refers to provisions of law limiting the penalty privilege to "matters relating exclusively to the business of the Government of the United States" and to other laws requiring that all printing for government departments must be done at the Government Printing Office at Washington, and that all envelopes used by the departments must be purchased under contracts made by the postmaster general.

The sending of specimens to a State Laboratory is not "exclusively the business of the Government of the United States."

The use of penalty envelopes, cards and labels is regulated by law and it is necessary to comply strictly with the provisions of the law. The Public Health Service does not have any authority to authorize their use in any way not contemplated by the law.

Respectfully,

(Signed) H. S. CUMMING,  
*Surgeon-General.*